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# The Old Testament Trinitarian Thinking and the Qur'an: Dialoguing with Muslims

## Pastoral Remarks

My approach in this article is pastoral. To speak and reflect on God is the most noble and encouraging endeavor. Understanding God in the way He has made Himself known to humanity stimulates the highest activity in which humans can be involved. This enterprise sheds light on who God is and what He is doing. The better we know Him, the more we can admire and follow Him. The most honorable privilege is, indeed, to know God personally, nurture an intimate relationship with Him, and study His stunning character of love. Cultivating His presence, closeness, grace, and guidance in everyday life is the most satisfying and rewarding experience, because it fills one's heart with inner peace and joy. Everything meaningful in spiritual life flows from fostering this practical knowledge and understanding of God.

However, a discussion with Muslims about God, especially the Triune God, can be quite painful, because the strongest Islamic polemic against Christianity focuses on the doctrine of the Trinity. They have a different perception of God and like to stress that Christians believe in three gods (tri-theism). They plainly state in their publications and conversations that they do not believe in the Trinity, denying the divinity of Jesus Christ, or that Jesus is the Son of God. They consider Jesus only to be a Prophet (Qur'an 3:84; 5:46). They also refuse to believe in the crucifixion of Jesus (Qur'an 4:157), but affirm His resurrection and ascension into heaven (Qur'an 3:55; 4:158; 5:117; 19:33). In support of their stand against the Trinity, Muslims quote the Qur'an. The heaviest quotations in this regard are the following two: (1) "Do not say 'Three.' Refrain; most charitable is it for you; surely Allah is only One God" (Qur'an 4:171); (2) "They do blas-

pheme who say: God is the third of three, for there is no God except One God" (Qur'an 5:73).

These verses may be explained in their context as not being against the fundamental Christian belief in the Triune God, but this is not how Muslim scholars interpret them. It is true that one cannot prove the truth about the Triune God from the Qur'an, but I also believe that one can demonstrate that this biblical belief, if rightly understood, does not stand in opposition to the Qur'anic teaching.

How should one approach this crucial topic with our Muslim friends? Here are a few practical suggestions:

1. Successful work with the followers of Islam begins with our positive attitude toward them and a clear understanding of the immense value of all of God's children. Muslims are people God loves, and we need to build bridges with them instead of walls. Each Muslim is someone's child, so let us treat them as we would like our children to be treated.

2. Before we began to speak, we have already spoken. Muslims observe our lives and how we live. Our lifestyle needs to be consistent with our professed faith. We need to first of all build a personal friendship with them which may open their hearts and create a trusting relationship and genuine friendship. We need to be recognized and acknowledged by them as a spiritual person, a person devoted to God, a "better Muslim." Only then will they take seriously what we say.

3. Before we speak, we must listen. We need to be very sensitive to the objections of our Muslim friends. Respect their opinions even though we may disagree with them. Listening is an important art. True communication is not that we speak and they listen, we teach and they learn. The right paradigm of the open dialogue is that we listen, learn, value, respect, and then we share. In doing so, our message does not change, but we show a genuine interest and care.

4. We should not start our conversation with our Muslim friends with the topic of the Trinity.<sup>1</sup> This is an unhealthy beginning, because this theme is the most repulsive to them and very divisive. Their "popular" (or "street") understanding of the Trinity is very different from the biblical view. They think that Christians believe in the Trinity in terms of God (Allah), having sexual relations with Mary that produced a son, Jesus Christ, which is a concept the Qur'an absolutely forbids (Qur'an 5:116). When you do share your biblical convictions on this matter, they will anticipate that you invite them to believe in three separate Gods (the God Father, the God Son, and the God Holy Spirit), which again goes contrary to their monotheistic belief. To accept such a faith would be considered by Muslims as the greatest apostasy which is called *shirk*.<sup>2</sup> Within Islam, *shirk* is an unforgivable crime. God may forgive any sin except for *shirk*: "Surely Allah

does not forgive that (anything) should be associated with Him, . . . and whoever associates (anything) with Allah, then he has readily fabricated a tremendous vice" (Qur'an 4:48).

5. Consciously, gradually, and carefully prepare the way for stimulating conversations on this topic, because to accept the biblical teaching on the Trinity will represent a massive step in their faith development and understanding of God. Studying this biblical truth must be practical and a very positive experience. This cannot happen, of course, in a short period of time. Prejudice is deeply rooted and change does not easily come. The preparation stage includes acceptance of other biblical truth, which will prepare them for the next step (John 8:32). In order to accept the doctrine on the Trinity, it is necessary to study and responsibly answer at least three crucial issues with sets of questions: (1) Who is Jesus Christ? Is He the Savior? Can He forgive sins? Is He eternal? Is He the true and full God in the highest sense? (2) Is the doctrine of the Trinity biblical? Is it solidly rooted in the Bible? Is it in contradiction to the Hebrew biblical thinking on monotheism? (3) What are the different roles of the Spirit of God? Is the Holy Spirit a mere force and influence, or a person?

6. Help your Muslim friends in their spiritual life to personally know God on an existential level. God should not be understood as a nice theory or just on an informational level but in a very personal and relational way. Cultivating a relationship with Him is the key issue, the first and utmost important task, because the Creator God is the God of relationships. Muslims need to learn what it means to walk daily with God (Micah 6:8), and our goal should always be to bring people closer to an intimate encounter with Him. A very fruitful approach in dialoguing with Muslims is to begin by speaking about God's uniqueness, His goodness, His names,<sup>3</sup> and His judgment (for a biblical positive understanding of divine judgment, see Moskala 2011:28-49) in order that they may be attracted to the beauty of His character, followed by spending time praying with them.

7. The crucial question in accepting the Trinitarian thinking is who is Jesus Christ. All the rest depends on this. It is crucial that Jesus' teaching, actions, Person, and role be explained, because when a person will accept Jesus as the One who can help, forgive sins, give peace, and be worshiped, only then can Jesus be recognized as eternal God, because only God can forgive sins, judge, and give everlasting life. Once the believer experiences forgiveness of sins and rejoices in the assurance of salvation coming from Jesus, who died for our sins, then he/she is ready to see His elevated authority, exceptional qualities, and divine status. This paves the way for embracing the biblical (not philosophical) doctrine of the Trinity. People need to be led into a deeper biblical knowledge, thus growing in the Lord.

8. After establishing common ground, one can also continue with an

explanation of the work of the Spirit of God. Being under the influence of the Holy Spirit will open the heart and mind of people to understand the Word of God and accept Jesus as their personal Savior. An experience with the Holy Spirit can be established through prayer because the Spirit of God changes lives, fills us with peace and joy, helps us in the everyday struggles to make the right decisions, gives victory over temptations, and leads to a correct orientation in life.<sup>4</sup>

9. Our Muslim friends need to understand that the Bible is the uncorrupted Word of God. The Qur'an affirms that a true Muslim should believe in the Bible (Qur'an 5:84; 10:94).

10. Only after Muslims accept that you belong among the People of the Book (Qur'an 3:113-115; 4:135-136; 5:67-68), can you study with them concerning the biblical witness on this topic—using both the Old and New Testaments. Share with them what the Triune God means for you. Tell your personal testimony of what difference this biblical teaching has made in your life. It is not only important to explain that the Trinitarian teaching is biblical and “makes sense” but demonstrate that it actually “changes life,” because to know the Triune God is a life-transforming experience. The crucial questions are: What difference does it make for me to know and experience God as the One God in three persons? How does it affect my marriage, family life, attitudes at work, relationship with strangers, place in society, and understanding of the plan of salvation? Does this teaching make me a better person, spouse, parent, worshiper, worker, neighbor, and/or friend? How does this knowledge enrich my everyday spiritual life?

The premise of this article is that Hebrew as well as Arabic are Semitic languages, so it may be helpful to Muslims to see what vocabulary, concepts, hints, and pointers to the Trinitarian thinking are expressed in the Hebrew Bible in order to understand this biblical truth. It will lead them later to study more explicitly the Trinitarian doctrine in the New Testament. For this reason, this research is limited only to the Old Testament—the Bible of Jesus Christ, the apostles, and the early Church—in order to demonstrate that Trinitarian thinking is biblical, rooted in the Hebrew Scriptures, and not in contradiction to Semitic thinking. What follows should be used only in advanced conversations with our Muslim friends. Remember that you did not become a Seventh-day Adventist because you understood the doctrine of the Trinity; you grew into this knowledge.

### **God Is One**

As demonstrated above, one of the greatest obstacles for Muslims to accept Seventh-day Adventism is faith in the Triune God, the fundamental mystery of the Christian faith (Berkhof 1979:82-99; Coppedge 2007; Culver

2005:104-121; Erickson 2000; and Grudem 1994:226-261). As Seventh-day Adventists, we confess that God is One but manifested in three distinct persons—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Whidden, Moon, and Reeve 2002; Canale 2000:105-159; Rice 1997:58-71; Ministerial Association 2005:23-33).

When we speak about God, we need to remember that we enter holy ground, and we need to do it in deep humility knowing our limits.<sup>5</sup> We are using imperfect human language to describe an infinite God! The transcendent God always surpasses even our finest categories of thinking and logic.<sup>6</sup> The best attitude in such a situation is a humbleness to which God invited Moses when he encountered God: "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (Exod 3:5). We need to realize that we know God only because He has made Himself known to us. What we perceive about Him was revealed to us; we are totally dependent upon His self-revelation (Exod 34:6-7; Deut 29:29). Thus, our only correct response to His Word is to carefully listen, eagerly learn, and wholeheartedly obey (Isa 66:2).

The same reverence toward God is taught in the Qur'an where Allah (the Arabic term for God) is presented with many admirable attributes.<sup>7</sup> Muslims need to repent, obey Him, and follow His right path.<sup>8</sup> "Muslim scholars state that Islam is an all-encompassing system—a sociopolitical, socioreligious system, as well as socioeconomic, socioeducational, legislative, judiciary, and military system governing every aspect of the lives of its adherents, their relationship among themselves, and with those who are non-Muslims" (Al-Bukhari 2007:62).

The basic confession of faith of the Hebrew Bible, "*Shema Yisrael, Adonay Eloheinu, Adonay echad*" "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deut 6:4), is a clear proclamation of monotheism in a polytheistic society. This *Shema* announces God as being one in a very fundamental and unequivocal statement. This oneness of God is stressed several times in the rest of the OT, because He alone is the true God and besides Him there is none (see Deut 4:35, 39; Neh 9:6; Ps 86:10; Isa 44:6; Zech 14:9).

Does this Old Testament statement allow for a belief in the Trinity or is it excluded by this definition (for more about the Trinity in the Old Testament, see Coppedge 2007:53-75; Edgar 2004:69-118; Geisler and Saleeb 2002:269-277; Grudem 1994:226-230; Gulley 2006:80-97; Letham 2004:17-33; Moskala 2010:245-275; and Oeming 2002:41-54)? It is important to note that the New Testament authors also proclaimed that God is one (see Mark 12:29; 1 Cor 8:5-6; Eph 4:6; 1 Tim 2:5; Jas 2:19), and thus they did not see this announcement as a contradiction to the Trinitarian thinking to which they adhered (Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:14).<sup>9</sup> The Qur'an similarly attests

that God is one (see Qur'an 3:2, 6, 18; 13:30; 16:17-20; 18:20, 21; 25:2-3; 35:3; 114:1-3).

People usually think that the Trinitarian teaching can be found only in the New Testament. A basic question is to see if there is room for Trinitarian thinking in the Old Testament? Do we have any hints, traces, pointers, or allusions for the doctrine of the Trinity in the Hebrew Bible, the Holy Scriptures of Jesus and His apostles? Does the New Testament introduce a completely new concept that is foreign to the Hebrew understanding of God? Is the Old Testament's view of the Godhead compatible with the Trinity?

This article investigates how the Old Testament speaks about the Triune God and Christ to see if its language could be used in dialoguing with and witnessing to our Muslim brothers and sisters and others friends. What vocabulary would be Muslim friendly, close to their culture, and acceptable to their Semitic thinking? What Trinitarian terms could help them to view this biblical doctrine as not being so offensive?<sup>10</sup>

### Allusions to the Trinity in the Old Testament

In the Hebrew language, a general term used to designate God is *Elohim*, a plural form of *El/Eloah*.<sup>11</sup> This plural form was often interpreted as an indication for the Trinity (Berkhof 1979:85-86; Coppedge 2007:71-72). However, to state that the plural form of the word *elohim* is evidence for the Triune God is incorrect for the simple reason that this term is used to designate the true living God as well as pagan gods; its meaning depends on the context. "The word *elohim* is unique in its 'flexibility'—it can be used both in the singular and the plural meaning, as a proper and a common name, as a designation of the God of Israel and of pagan gods" (Slivniak 2005:4). A good example of these two opposite meanings is encountered in Ruth 1:15-16: "'Look,' said Naomi [to Ruth], 'your sister-in-law [Orpah] is going back to her people and her gods [*elohim*]. Go back with her.' But Ruth replied, 'Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God [*Elohim*] my God [*Elohim*]' (see also 1 Kgs 18:24; Isa 37:15, 19). Therefore, one cannot argue from the plural form of *Elohim* for the notion of the Trinity. The term *Elohim* does not refer to three persons or three gods. It is rather a neutral expression; only the context decides the precise meaning of the word.

What is highly significant is that the name *Elohim* is used with a verb in the singular (a grammatical contradiction). For example, "In the beginning God [plural] created [singular] the heaven and the earth" (Gen 1:1).<sup>12</sup> The same is true about the ten expressions of *vayomer Elohim* meaning "and God [plural] said [singular]" in the first Creation account (Gen 1).



The translation is thus not "gods," but "God," the one true living God. It is also crucial to note that pagan gods are never designated in the Bible by the name of the Lord (*Yahweh*). This name is used exclusively for the God who entered into a covenant relationship with His people!

### The "We" of God

God usually speaks about Himself in the "I" formula (e.g., Exod 20:2; Isa 41:10, 13). However, five times (in four biblical verses), He refers to Himself in the category of "We."

1. Gen 1:26: "Then God said, 'Let us make [*na'aseh*] man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'"

2. Gen 3:22: "And the LORD God said, 'The man has now become [was] like one of us [*ke'achad mimmenu*], knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.'"

3. and 4. Gen 11:7: "Come, let us go down [*nerdah*] and confuse [*venabelah*] their language so they will not understand each other."

5. Isa 6:8: "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us [*umi yelech lanu*]?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'"

Three times these specific proclamations are stated in cohortative forms, i.e., admonitions in the first person plural ("let us make," "let us go down," "let us confuse") and twice with prepositions ("of us," "for us"). How should we understand these plural divine expressions? Are they in contradiction to biblical monotheism, or do such divine proclamations testify about the triune God?

In this context, it is important to note that in the Qur'an God often speaks in the "We" formula (e.g., Qur'an 2:25; 10:66, 94; 17:13; 35:9; 37:104-107). Here is a potential common and fruitful ground between Christianity and the Islamic faith. It is crucial to observe that Christians, Jews, and Muslims speak about their God in the plural form. What does this plurality reveal about God in the Hebrew Bible?

There have been several attempts to explain this divine plural usage. In the history of the interpretation of this phenomenon, one can find eight main theories, however an exhaustive list of different theories is not provided here (for a detailed description of different theories, see Climes 1968:62-69; Hamilton 1990:132-134; Hasel 1975:58-66; Kidner 1967:50-52; Miller 1978:9-26; Moskala 2010:250-255; and Wenham 1987:27-29).

## Determination of the “We” of God by the Context

What does the context provide for understanding the divine “Us”?

### First Passage (Gen 1:26)

God the Creator deliberately presents Himself as “We” and not as “I” when He creates humans. The divine “We” forms people in His image; it means that this divine “We” makes humans as “we” also (as husband and wife), that is, not as isolated individuals, but persons in relationship to Him and to each other. Thus, God creates humans into a close fellowship. God is plural and when He creates humanity into His image, He makes them in plural, that is, He creates persons into fellowship.

From the very beginning, God wants to be known not by His “I” but “We” in His relationship to humanity. This is why He also creates “we” (humans as male and female). Humans created into His image must also be a plurality as He is We; and as there is a unity within God Himself, so the two human persons, distinct and different, should become intimately one. Thus, the whole human being is “WE” and not “I”! This is only on condition that they live in close personal fellowship. To do so, they need to stay in relationship with Him who created them out of love. Thus, when God creates, He creates into fellowship, creates humans as “we.” On the background of this immediate context of Gen 1:26, I want to propose that the plural of the divine “We” is a plural of fellowship or plural of community within the Godhead. This conclusion is confirmed by three additional passages.

### Second Passage (Gen 3:22)

The immediate context of Gen 3:22 is the fall into sin, a reverse or de-creation of creation. The human’s “we” is broken; they became sinners, degraded, and their “we” is wrecked. When the “we” of humanity is depraved (not only with one individual but collectively), God speaks in plural, and confronts “we,” humanity.

Humans were created in dependency upon God, in fellowship with Him, and when this intimate relationship was broken, then meaningful life disappeared. When “we” is dysfunctional, then fellowship and integrity are ruined. The first couple wanted to be like God, to decide for themselves what was good and evil. By sinning, humans lost the capacity to discern what was good and evil. Only the grace of God’s We could bring healing to humanity.

The literal translation of this text (Gen 3:22) is: “Behold, the man was [not “has become”] like one of us knowing good and evil.” The meaning of the *hayah ke* is “was like” and not necessarily “become like.” The first



couple wanted to be like God, which meant deciding for themselves what was good and evil. By sinning, humans lost the capacity to discern what was good and evil. Today we are totally dependent upon God's revelation in order to know what is good and evil.

### Third Passage (Gen 11:4-7)

God's speech in Gen 11:7, "Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other," is a direct reaction to the arrogant speech and proud attitude of the human's "let us." The Babylonians stated: "Let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens" (Gen 11:4). When humans rebel and build their "we" against God, He reveals His We!

The passage of Gen 11:1-9 is written in a chiasmic literary structure to help us discern the whole pattern:

**ACvv. 1-2** Narrative: humanity's one language and their settling

**BCvv. 3-4** Speech of people: "Let us reach heaven."

**CCv. 5** Narrative: JUDGMENT-God's investigation

**B'Cvv. 6-7** Divine speech: "Let us go down."

**A'Cvv. 8-9** Narrative: many languages and scattering of the people

Part A parallels A', B matches with B', and at the climax of the whole structure (C) lies a message of God's judgment. The thematic correspondence matches well with different literary genres used in this passage; there is an alteration between the narratives and the speeches. For the purpose of our study, it is important to stress that v. 7 matches with v. 4. Humanity's anti-godly behavior "Let us build a city and reach heaven" is in direct opposition to God's "Let us"! God directly answers to humanity's rebellious "we" with His "We": "Come, let us go down and confuse their language" (Gen 11:7).

When humans build their "we" against God, He reveals to them in His WE. God's "WE" stands in contrast to humanity's rebellious "we." In this biblical text, as well as in the previous one, these plural forms of divine addresses point to "the fate of humanity" (Sarna 1989:12). Humans need to submit to We and live in close fellowship with Him in order to live an integral, harmonious, and happy life with each other.

### Fourth Passage (Isa 6:8)

In the vision of the holiness of God, Isaiah is convinced of his sinfulness. After divine cleansing, God asks: "Whom shall I send? And Isaiah responds: "Here I am, send me." The prophet is sent with a special divine commission of calling a sinful people to repentance. In v. 8, God speaks for the first time. Only after purification is Isaiah ready to meet directly with God and learn God's purpose for him. "Only when his sin, seen in all its massive and objective reality, is removed can Isaiah hear the voice of God" (Childs 2001:56).

In this setting, the divine plural statement refers to God Himself because of the strength of the Hebrew parallelism in the verse: (A) "Whom shall I send?" (B) "Who will go for us?" The "I" in the first question corresponds to the "us" in the second one. Thus the match leads to the apparent conclusion that it is God Himself who speaks here for Himself, and He is not doing it for Himself and additional heavenly beings, His court, His lords or advisers. Isaiah will be on God's mission for His cause. The stress is on the divine commission. God sends and gives a message, and the prophet should go for Him. He is not a speaker for the heavenly court but for God Himself! He is accountable to Him! Isaiah is sent to people—to plurality. It is noteworthy that even though J. Alec Motyer argues in Isa 6:8 for a "plural of consultation," he adds that the New Testament "relates this passage both to the Lord Jesus (John 12:41) and to the Holy Spirit (Acts 28:25), finding here that which will accommodate the full revelation of the triune God" (Motyer 1993:78).

Our fresh investigation of the divine plural expressions in these four passages under scrutiny leads to a surprising conclusion. God speaks about Himself as "We," and this expression points to a *plural of fellowship or community within the Godhead*. This plurality is a "plurality of Persons" (Hatton 2001:26). God communicates within Himself; He is in a dialogue within the Godhead.

Edward J. Young speaks about the "plurality of persons in the Speaker" (Young 1965:254), Gerhard F. Hasel about "an intra-divine deliberation" (1975:65), and Allen P. Ross about "a potential plural, expressing the wealth of potentials in the divine being. . . . These plurals do not explicitly refer to the triunity of the Godhead but do allow for that doctrines development through the process of progressive revelation" (1988:12).

The "We" expressions of God do not contradict biblical monotheism but point to the Trinitarian thinking rooted in the Old Testament even though they do not yet proclaim the Trinity plainly. It is crucial to observe that the New Testament is not presenting something which is entirely new or foreign to Hebrew thinking!

## The "We" of Allah Explanations

There are two main explanations in Islam for the "We" of Allah used in the Qur'an. One group interprets this phenomenon as a literary stylistic form, and the others, as being a plural of majesty. Muzammil Siddiqi provides the first interpretation and states that it is "a style of speech" (Siddiqi 2001:1). He asserts: "Sometime[s] the speaker says I and sometime[s] says we" (2001:1).<sup>13</sup> A second very popular explanation among Muslims maintains that this plural pronoun is a "plural of respect and honor" as in royal proclamations.<sup>14</sup> Hussein Abdul-Raof speaks about "the majestic plural" (2005:120). Scholars agree that God (Allah) is viewed and understood differently by Muslims than the Christian God: Allah is a solitary God in the sense of singularity (see Geisler and Saleeb 2002:270), but the Christian God is plurality in unity who transcends all our limited categories of singularity and plurality (Ratzinger 1979:128-129).

In view of the majesty and otherness of our God, we are not able to "explain" God, His Being, and it would be foolishness even to try. God reveals the essentials about Himself so that we can know Him and grow into His fullness (John 17:3; Eph 4:13). We should fellowship with Him and bow down in admiration before Him and His revelation (Isa 66:2)! This will enable us to cultivate meaningful relationships and fellowship with others. God is the foundation of society, because He is We, He is Plurality, and from Him flows all the blessing.

## The Meaning of Echad ("One") in Deut 6:5

We need to ask a very important question: Is the *Shema* of Deut 6:5 in contradiction to our conclusion so far? In the Hebrew language there are two words for expressing the idea of one: *echad* and *yachid*. The term *echad* is used in the *Shema*. There are at least three nuances of meanings for the word *echad* in relationship to Deut 6:5.<sup>15</sup> The Lord is ONE means that:

### The Lord Is Unique

He is utterly holy; it means He is different from anyone else. One can speak about the otherness of God, because as a holy Being, He is the Other One. Thus, one is not a numerical value but a description of the quality!

### The Lord Is Exclusive

God alone is worthy of our praise, because He is faithful. He is the God of all gods. It does not mean a hierarchy within a pantheon of gods with the Lord as the Most High God as would be suggested by the historical background of the polytheistic society, but rather His exclusive position, because other gods are nothing—they have no life, they cannot hear, see,

intervene, or act (Isa 44:6-20). Our God, the Lord is real. No one can be compared to Him (Deut 4:39; Isa 45:18).

### The Lord Is Unity

It means God is oneness. The word *echad* indicates also the invisible and indivisible unity of the Lord. It is interesting that in the *Shema* the two names for God are used: *Elohim* and *Yahweh*. Both terms contain a different message in their meaning. *Elohim* points to a mighty, powerful God ('*el*' = powerful, mighty), universal, distant God, God of all humanity, God Creator, transcendent God who creates by His word (in the first biblical creation account this phrase is used ten times: "And God said" — Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29; see also Pss 33:6, 9; 148:5; Isa 55:11; Heb 11:3). *Yahweh*, on the other hand, is an imminent, near, intimate God, God of the covenant, God of His people who enter into a covenantal relationship with Him. *Yahweh* is a personal God who creates persons by His personal, close involvement.<sup>16</sup> These two names are an inner indicator for the different aspects of God's involvement with humans.

This term *echad* does not speak about the singularness or solicitude of God! He is one but not single or isolated. Here is the reference of plurality within the oneness of God. This term is better translated as "unity." This can be observed from other texts which employ this word *echad*. For example, in marriage there is a close unity of two individuals (husband and wife): "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one [*echad*] flesh" (Gen 2:24). This oneness is not about numbers but closeness of relationship, expressing a close unity! Other texts to consider are Gen 11:1, 6; 34:16; Exod 24:3; Num 13:23; Ezra 2:64; Jer 32:38-39; Ezek 11:19; 37:17, 19, 22 which speak about different people or nations becoming one, that is, united (compare with Ps 133:1).

On the other hand, the term *yachid* (as masculine, 9 times, and feminine, 3 times; "only," "only one," "lonely," "solitary," "single," "precious life") occurs all together twelve times in the Old Testament (Gen 22:2, 12, 16; Judg 11:34; Ps 22:20; 25:16; 35:17; 68:6; Prov 4:3; Jer 6:26; Amos 8:10; and Zech 12:10) and expresses the idea of one in the sense of singleness, solicitude, and exclusivity.

Our God is not *yachid*, "one," in the sense of a solitary or lonely Being. There is a fellowship of love and unselfishness within the Godhead, a unity within a community of persons.

### Someone Coming from God Is God

God promised that a special child would be born of a virgin (i.e., by

supernatural intervention), and this child would be God. It meant that someone was coming from God and even though He was called "son," He was "God." "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel" (Isa 7:14; compare with Matt 1:18-23). "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa 9:6).

### The Angel of the Lord Passages

The Old Testament presents striking narratives of a being who is called the "Angel of the Lord" or sometimes simply the "Angel," but acts and speaks like God and is identified as God. These manifestations provide a profound riddle, because the "Angel of the Lord" is both referred to as God and also distinguished from God who resides in heaven. There are a good number of biblical passages with this theme of the "Angel of the Lord": Gen 16:7-14; 21:17; 22:11-18; 31:3-13; 48:15-16; Exod 3:2-7; 14:19; 23:20-23; Num 22:22-35; Judg 2:1-5; 6:11-24; 13:3-23; 1 Kgs 19:5-7; 2 Kgs 1:3-4; 1 Chr 21:13-30; Zech 3:1-2. Consider the following:

1. The phrase *mal'ach YHWH* (the "Angel" or "Messenger of the Lord") is used for the first time in the story about Hagar and Ishmael, and therefore it is Muslim friendly (Gen 16:7-14). Hagar recognizes that this Angel of the Lord is God, the Living One, who speaks to her (v. 13). The Angel of the Lord promises Hagar: "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count" (v. 10; this is reaffirmed in 17:20 and fulfilled in 25:13-16) which is similar to the statement God made to Abraham (Gen 13:16; 22:17). In this context for the first time the Lord gives a name to a child—Ishmael (v. 11).

2. In Genesis 22 the Angel of the Lord speaks to Abraham and is identified as the Lord (compare vv. 12b and 16b). He speaks twice (vv. 11-12; 15-18), and God (*Elohim*) is mentioned five times (vv. 1, 3, 8, 9, 12). It is *Yahweh* who saves Abraham from sacrificing his son by providing the ram "as a burnt offering instead of his son" (v. 13), and blesses him. Three times the key phrase "the Lord will provide" occurs: in v. 8, it is *Elohim* who "will provide a lamb"; in v. 14, it is mentioned twice that it is *Yahweh* who will provide it.

3. The Angel of God plainly declares to Jacob that He is God: "I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me" (Gen 31:13a). Twenty years earlier in Bethel the Lord appeared to Jacob in a dream assuring him that he was not alone and blessed him, and Jacob made a vow to be faithful to Him (Gen 28:10-22).

4. When Jacob blessed Joseph, he equated the Angel with the Lord:

"May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the Angel who has delivered me from all harm—may he bless these boys" (Gen 48:15B16a).

5. "There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up" (Exod 3:2). When Moses came closer to investigate what was going on, the Lord God commanded him "from within the bush" to take off his sandals, because he was in His very presence (3:5). "At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God" (3:6b). The Lord then commissioned Moses to his special mission to lead His people from Egypt (Exod 3:7-4:17), and God miraculously liberated them (Exod 5-15; see also Exod 23:20-23; Acts 7:35-36).

6. In the period of the judges, there are several episodes which deal with the Angel of the Lord. These narratives (Judg 2, 6, and 13) demonstrate that the Angel of the Lord was the Lord of the Exodus: "The angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bokim and said, 'I brought you up out of Egypt and led you into the land that I swore to give to your forefathers'" (Judg 2:1). Similarly in the story of Judges 6-7 about Gideon's splendid victory over the Midianites, the Angel of the Lord and the Lord are terms describing the same reality (see 6:11, 14, 16, 20-25). The same is true in Judges 13 in the narrative about the birth of Samson (see especially vv. 3, 6, 13, 19-23) when Manoah, after encountering the Angel of the Lord who also appears in the story in the form of a man, exclaimed: "We have seen God" (13:22).

7. The Angel of the Lord passage in Zechariah 3 reveals the extraordinary position of that being: He rebukes Satan, commands others to obey Him, removes iniquity, orders that new garments be put on Joshua, forgives sins, and commissions Joshua, the high priest (3:1-2, 4-6). These actions are prerogatives of God, yet this Angel is distinct from God Himself. This points to the plurality within God, to two divine distinct persons.

Thus, on the basis of the close reading of the above biblical texts in their immediate context and larger theological framework, one can conclude that this "Angel of the Lord" is a divine being, the pre-incarnate Christ appearing as God's Messenger.<sup>17</sup> It is significant that Zech 12:8 equates God and the Angel of the Lord. These appearances in the form of the Angel of the Lord were preparatory to Jesus' incarnation, they were Christophanies. The Apostle Paul stresses that it was Christ who led Israel out of Egypt to the Promised Land, thus he identifies who the Angel of the Lord is: "They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ" (1 Cor 10:3-4).

It is noteworthy to mention that this terminology about Jesus Christ,



as being the Angel of the Lord, is easily accepted by Muslim believers, because they strongly believe in the existence of angels. It does not offend them, so it is a good way to present to them many Old Testament stories and introduce them to the presence of Jesus, thereby demonstrating His active role in Old Testament history, because He was the One who at that time was in contact with God's people.

### Theophanies

A theophany is God's temporal appearing in bodily form long before Jesus's incarnation. This spacial manifestation is mentioned several times in the Hebrew Scriptures where God comes down and presents Himself in the form of a man in whom is recognized the pre-incarnate Christ, because in the context this Man is identified as God. These theophanies are actually Christophanies in the Hebrew Scriptures.

1. According to Genesis 18, three men visited Abraham (18:1-2), and he showed them his generous hospitality. Later in the story, two of them departed to Sodom (18:16, 22), and they are identified as angels or messengers (19:1, 15) but also as men (19:5, 10, 12). The Man who stayed and communicated with Abraham is identified as the Lord (18:10, 14, 17, 20, 22, 33) and the Judge of all the earth (18:25). Abraham is further dialoguing with God and asking for His mercy over Sodom to spare their lives if only ten righteous can be found there (18:23-32). The Lord graciously granted his prayer (18:32).

2. According to Genesis 32, Jacob wrestles with a man (v. 14) who is later identified as God (v. 30). Jacob realized that he was encountering a heavenly divine being, because he asks this Man to bless him. God then changes his name and blesses him (vv. 28-29). Jacob explains why he named that place *Peniel* (The Face of God): "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared" (v. 30; see also Hos 12:3-5).

3. Josh 5:13-15 tells the story about Joshua meeting a man who is the "commander of the army of the Lord." Joshua worshiped him and was not reproached for it. This Man commanded Joshua to do exactly the same thing that God had asked Moses to do according to Exod 3:2-6: "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy." Joshua is thus a new Moses and is commissioned to conquer the Promised Land.

4. Dan 10:5 describes Daniel's vision in which he saw a "Man in linen" (see also Dan 12:6-7). The comparison of Dan 10:5-6 with Josh 5:13-15, Ezek 1:26-28, Dan 8:11, and Rev 1:13-17 leads to the conclusion that this Man in linen is a divine being, the pre-incarnate Christ (see Doukhan 2000:159-160).

## **The Son of God**

The expression “Son of God” in Dan 3:25 is pointing to a supernatural being: “‘Look!’ he answered, ‘I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire; and they are not hurt, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God’” (NKJV). King Nebuchadnezzar saw the pre-incarnate Christ who was walking with the three Hebrew friends in the fiery furnace and protecting them. As a pagan ruler, he most probably said: “but the form of the fourth is like a son of the gods [or a divine son, or the son of gods [*bar elahim* in Aramaic],” that is, a divine being (see Steinmann 2008:189; Harman 2007:87-89; and Lukas 2002:92). This was from Nebuchadnezzar’s religious perspective. However, from our Christian perspective, we recognize that person as Christ, the true Son of God (for details, see Steinmann 2008:193-196; Miller 1994:123-124; and Black 2010). Christ literally fulfilled God’s promise to be with His people in order to deliver them: “When you will walk through the fire, you shall not be burnt, nor shall the flame scorch you” (Isa 43:1). We need to remember that Daniel and his three friends were in contact with Nebuchadnezzar before that event, and they could have given him some good insights into their faith (see Dan 1-2).

However, from the Muslim perspective, the expression “Son of God” is very offensive, therefore we should avoid it in our first contacts. The Qur’an states explicitly that Allah does not have a son: “Allah did not take to Himself a son, nor has He another god with Him” (23:91; see also 31:13). Daniel 3 also described the same being as the angel/messenger (v. 28), the term which can build bridges between us and our Muslim friends when we retell them this and other stories about Jesus.

## **The Son of Man**

The Prophet Daniel in his vision of the heavenly pre-advent judgment mentions two separate heavenly divine beings—the “Ancient of Days” and the “Son of Man.” The Ancient of Days, the Heavenly Father, presides over the judgment, but the prominence of the Son of Man is stressed by associating Him with the clouds as One “coming with the clouds of heaven”; clouds being a symbol used in conjunction with the appearance of deity (Davidson 1996:102-103); giving Him full authority and worshipping Him. Thus, two divine beings are presented in Daniel 7:13-14: “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.” This most beloved title that

Jesus used for Himself is completely acceptable for Muslim believers.

### The Servant of the Lord

In the book of Isaiah, there are at least four songs of the Servant of the Lord, *ebed YHWH* (Isa 41:1-9; 49:1-7; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12), so-called songs of the Suffering Servant which culminate with the fifth song about the anointing of the Messiah (Isa 61:1-3). These songs point to the Messiah Jesus Christ (see especially Acts 8:30-39) and identify Him as the Savior.<sup>18</sup> In the inaugurating sermon of His public ministry, Jesus Christ read the first verses from Isaiah 61 and then boldly proclaimed that this prophetic statement had just been fulfilled in front of their eyes (Luke 4:16-21).

The phrase "the Servant of the Lord" describing the mission of Jesus is Muslim friendly. Jesus is considered in Islam to be the "Servant of Allah" (Qur'an 19:27-33). Thus, there is no problem for them to understand and accept that Jesus is the Servant of the Lord. It is profitable to gradually open to them the magnificent, salvific, and substitutionary role of this Servant on our behalf by explaining what He did and accomplished for us (see especially Isa 53; for further study see Kaiser 1995:155-185; and Satterthwaite, Hess, and Wenham 1995:105-165).

### Davidic King

The Messianic personage portrayed as a royal heir to the throne of David, the so-called Davidic King, is vividly depicted in Isa 11:1-16, Ezek 34:23-24; and 37:24-26 (Ladd 1978:7-12). His primary mission would be to establish justice as a just king. This King would also be their true Shepherd.

This royal ambitious terminology is not really appealing to the Muslim world, because of the current political situation and the connotations with David, kingship, dominion, and rulership from Jerusalem. When we speak with them about Messianic expectations, we need to stress the spiritual and eschatological nature of this hope. The Davidic King, the Messiah, will establish an eternal kingdom of peace and justice. He proceeds from the kingdom of grace to the kingdom of glory. It is interesting to note that in the time of Jesus the figure of the Davidic king was the most popular notion about the Messiah: they expected a political ruler who would overthrow the Romans and expel them from their land. This false expectation of a political Messiah led leaders to reject Jesus Christ when he came as the Suffering Servant. King David is highly revered by Muslims (see, for example, Qur'an 2:251; 6:84; 17:55; 34:10-11; 38:17-23), so the title Davidic King for Jesus, when sensitively introduced, should not present any offense to them.

## The Word of God

In the Hebrew Bible, the Word of God is creative, active, and powerfully accomplishes the unexpected. It is explicitly stated that God was creating by His Word: "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth" (Ps 33:6). The Old Testament speaks of the "Spirit of God" and the "Word of the Lord" in connection with the Creation of life (Gen 1:1-3). "For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm" (Ps 33:6). God's creative Word always accomplishes its purpose: "So is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it" (Isa 55:11; see also Jer 23:29).

Jesus Christ is presented in John 1:1-3, 14 as the Word of God in two capacities—as the Creator and as the Word incarnate: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. . . . The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." According to 1 Sam 15:26, Saul by refusing to obey the Word of God actually refused to obey God.

It is important to note that for Muslims the notion of the Word of God also lies at the heart of their religion (Qur'an 3:45; 4:171). "The axis of Islam is not the person of the Prophet but rather the Word of God, as revealed through him and laid down in the Koran" (Schimmel 1985:142).

## Wisdom of God

Wisdom is described in Proverbs as having God's prerogatives and in chapter 8 is a hypostasis of divine Wisdom with an independent existence. Wisdom "was appointed from eternity" (v. 23) for a specific work as mediator and communicator between the godhead and creation; existed before "the world began" (v. 23), "before the mountains were settled in place" (v. 25); was there when the Lord "set the heavens in place" (v. 27); and was the master craftsman, that is, the Co-Creator with the Lord, always beside and with Him rejoicing together in creative work (vv. 30, 31). Wisdom seems to enjoy the divine status and personifies Jesus Christ (for details, see Edgar 2004:85-102; Grudem 1994:229-230; and especially Davidson 2006:33-54). This is also a language acceptable for Muslims.

## God's Presence

God's Presence (literally "the Face of God") is personified in several biblical passages. God assured Moses that His Presence (*panay*) would go with him and God's people. Then Moses responded: "If your Presence [*paneycha*] does not go with us, do not send us up from here" (Exod 33:14-

15). Knight correctly explains: "Here God's face is clearly an alter ego of God, equated with the Name, and wholly equivalent to the Angel of the Covenant of Exod 23.20, in whom anyway the Name of God is to be found (23.21)" (Knight 1953:29). In Deuteronomy, Moses reminded the people how the Lord led them and the exodus occurred: "Because he loved your forefathers and chose their descendants after them, he brought you out of Egypt by his Presence [*bepanayw*] and his great strength" (4:37).

The strongest text in this regard is Isa 63:9: "In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence [unique expression appearing only here in the Old Testament; *mal'ach panayw*, literally "the angel of His face"] saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old." The face of God is His Presence. "The Messenger of God's Presence" was the Savior of Israel as was the Lord Himself (Isa 63:8). There is nothing problematic in this designation of Jesus for our Muslim friends.

### Michael

The Bible mentions Michael (his name means "Who is like God?") in five passages:

1. In Dan 10:13, Michael is presented as one of the chief princes.
2. In Dan 10:21, Michael is the only one who is able to help Gabriel in his battle over the minds of the Persian leaders. He is also portrayed as the Prince of God's people.
3. Dan 12:1 depicts Michael as the One who stands for His people, that is, he is their intercessor, protector, and help in the time of trouble. He is pictured as the great Prince.
4. According to Jude 1:9, Michael has authority to resurrect Moses and is characterized as an archangel.

5. In Rev 12:7, Michael is the leader of the heavenly army and defeats Satan and his fallen angels. His victory is described in a colorful manner.

When the above texts are connected with 1 Thess 4:16-18 and John 5:26-29, it becomes evident that Michael's voice is the voice of the archangel, and this is the voice of Jesus at the resurrection day. On the basis of his role, authority, position, and mission one may conclude that Michael is Christ.

Muslims also believe in the existence of Mikal (biblical Michael) and those who oppose him will suffer Allah's judgment: "Whoever is an enemy to Allah and His Angels and His Messengers, and Jibril and Mikal, then surely Allah is an enemy to the disbelievers" (Qur'an 2:98; this is the only but highly significant reference to Michael in the Qur'an).

## **Allusions to the Plurality of Persons within the Godhead**

There are OT texts which attest to the plurality of persons in God Himself (multi-personal God). Internal indicators point to this reality. Two clusters of such Old Testament passages can be gathered (for more details, see Moskala 2010:268-273): the first list refers to two divine persons (Gen 19:24; Exod 23:23; Ps 45:6-7; 110:1; Prov 8:30-31; 30:4; Dan 7:13-14; Hos 1:7; Zech 3:2; 10:12), and the second cluster points to three divine persons (Gen 1:1-3; Isa 11:1-2; 42:1; 48:16; 61:1-2; 63:8-10; Hag 2:4b-7).<sup>19</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This fresh investigation of the Old Testament Trinitarian thinking leads to a stunning conclusion. Never engage in a theological debate about the Trinity or the divinity of Jesus with your Muslim or Christian friends unless you bring them first to an existential knowledge of Jesus Christ, because this will help them to develop a personal relationship with Him. Only after a person accepts Jesus as his/her intimate Savior and Friend and falls in love with Him who forgives sins and helps in our everyday struggles, will that individual be open to accepting the divinity of Jesus and the biblical teaching on the Trinity.

Even though the divine expressions of “We” do not testify directly about the Trinity, they hint to a unity and complexity within the being of God. This plurality within deity is well attested to and developed in the New Testament (see especially Matt 28:19; John 1:3; Eph 3:9; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2). The biblical monotheistic belief does not think about God in terms of His solitude or His singleness but presents Him as “We,” or in fellowship within the Godhead. God created humanity in His image; He made humans in fellowship with each other, particularly husbands and wives in a close intimate relationship, because He is fellowship, He is in relationship within Himself. This divine plural of fellowship suggests plurality of persons and points to the unity in His nature. This intra-divine fellowship of one God within plurality is a unique characteristic of our God. God is in communication within Himself and with His creation. We can sensitively invite our Muslim friends into a personal knowledge of this God of relationships and interactions.

The doctrine of the Trinity is not yet fully developed in the Old Testament, but one can find impressive expressions pointing to Trinitarian thinking. We discovered that the Old Testament uses a whole plethora of terms for describing the second person of the Godhead which are Muslim friendly. It seems that the most fruitful and non-offensive Old Testament terms referring to the divinity of Jesus Christ in dialogue with Muslims are “Angel of the Lord,” “Servant of the Lord,” “Presence of God,” “Angel



of His Presence," "Wisdom of God," "Word of God," "Son of Man," and "Michael." To speak about God as "I" and at the same time as "We" is also a point of contact between Christians and Muslims, because the Qur'an speaks about Allah in those terms too. The biblical designation of God as "We" is Islamic friendly, and we can testify to them what this divine "We" means for us—believing in a personal, close, unselfish God of love, a God of relationships.

The biblical paradox affirms that God simultaneously exists in singular and plural. It leads to the conclusion that He is one but in different persons. God is not single nor married; He is in fellowship within Himself; He is community.<sup>20</sup> The community of God is the source and basis of all other communities within His creation. The community of God's "We" leads to the "we" of humanity and to the togetherness of all creation, even in the cosmic sense. God's unity ties all of God's creation together to form a rich diversity.

The expression "let us" is not a statement which speaks directly about the Trinity, but it does not contradict Trinitarian teaching. It is not a declaration about numbers (numerals), but about uniqueness, the quality of our God. Based on the background of the Hebrew monotheism and divine plural speeches, it becomes clear that these expressions leave room for the doctrine of the Trinity, because *echad* not only affirms the oneness and uniqueness of God, but also points to the unity within a plurality of fellowship.

It is true that the term "Trinity" is not a biblical term, but this term very well expresses in one catch word the important aspect of the biblical teaching about the Godhead. There are many other theological words which do not appear in the Bible, and we rightly use them, like incarnation, theophany, theocracy, eschatology, inspiration, etc., because these terms well capture the biblical meaning of the point. The "plural of fellowship" in the light of its context leads to the recognition of different persons within the Godhead in interaction. However, this plural is an indirect witness about the "heavenly trio."<sup>21</sup>

God is love (1 John 4:16) and love by definition is unselfish, directed to others. This unselfishness demands that God is not a solitary Person but in true fellowship within Himself (among equals), that is, the Being in fellowship within Divinity. The love relationship within the Godhead is the basis for all other interactions and is the source of all unselfish relationships. The God *Yahweh* is plurality and always in relationship, first of all in relationship within the Godhead and then in interaction with His creation. It means that our God longs for meaningful relationships with His creatures, because out of His love He created them to His image in multiple relationships after His pattern (Gen 1:26-27). As God is not a soli-

tary person so humans are not created for isolation but for social life in marriage and community.

We need to be careful, extremely careful, in our attempts to explain God so as not to create Him in our image! Humans were created in His image, and not vice versa. In view of the uniqueness and otherness of our God, it becomes clear that we cannot grasp the full picture of our Lord, as He is above our comprehension of His nature. We are limited in our understanding and capacities. We can only stand in awe before Him and admire Him as He reveals Himself to us in His Word. We can only ask for a wonder, for a glimpse to see Him and to worship Him, and to serve our awesome God who surpasses our concepts of understanding and logic (Exod 33:18, 19; 34:6, 7). He is always above all things and our expressions to grasp the reality of life. Instead of trying to explain the details regarding Him, let us relate to Him personally who is One and plurality of fellowship at the same time. Our goal should be to gratefully and faithfully follow God and interact with others whom He has put beside us as part of His marvelous creation.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>This may be possible only if God Himself prepares such a person to accept this truth through a dream or special revelation. However, even in this case, the person needs to be gradually led into the fullness of the biblical truth.

Remember your futile discussions on this subject with Jehovah Witnesses or historical Adventists. How many of them changed their opinion or were converted at the end?

The counsel of Ellen G. White cannot be more relevant: "If men reject the testimony of the inspired Scriptures concerning the deity of Christ, it is in vain to argue the point with them, for no argument, however conclusive, could convince them. 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.' 1 Cor 2:14. None who hold this error can have a true conception of the character or the mission of Christ, or of the great plan of God for man's redemption" (White 1911:524).

<sup>2</sup>Shirk is the sin of idolatry or polytheism, i.e., the deification or worship of anyone or anything other than the singular God, or associating "partners" with God, because nobody can share with Him His unique ultimate position.

<sup>3</sup>Muslim scholars speak of 99 names for Allah (see Vicchio 2008:1, 2).

<sup>4</sup>Muslims associate the Spirit of God with the angel Gabriel (Qur'an 16:104 [102]). Also Jesus is the Spirit of God (Qur'an 21:91).

<sup>5</sup>Before God we are like a small child with an extremely limited un-

derstanding. It is said that Augustine was walking at the seashore while thinking about the vastness of God and the mystery of the Trinity. He saw a small boy who was pouring sea water repeatedly into his hole in the sand. "What are you doing?" Augustine asked the boy. "Well, I am trying to pour the ocean into my hole!" he answered. Then Augustine whispered to himself (in another version of the story, Augustine heard a voice from heaven saying): "You silly man, you try a similar thing, to put an infinite God into the boundaries of your small brain."

<sup>6</sup>God surpasses even the best mathematical formulas, like  $1+1+1=1$  (illogical one) or  $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$  (mathematically correct), or graphic designs, like the triangle or the circle with three parts inside, or the unity of two persons in a harmonious marriage. All these analogies cannot express adequately the inner unity and harmony within the three persons of the Godhead.

<sup>7</sup>In the introductory passage to the whole Qur'an in Al Fatihah, God is introduced in the following way: "In The Name of Allah, The All-Merciful, The Ever-Merciful. Praise be to Allah, The Lord of the worlds. The All-Merciful, The Ever-Merciful. The Possessor of the Day of Doom. You only do we worship, and You only do we beseech for help. Guide us [in] the straight Path. The Path of the ones whom You have favored, other than that of the ones against whom You are angered, and not [that of] the erring" (Qur'an 1:1-7; Ghali 2005:1; see also Khalidi 2008:3).

<sup>8</sup>See Qur'an 1:6-7; 2:1; 3:84-85; 4:17-18; 7:153; 9:104; 39:53. Islam means total submission and devotion to God in all spheres of life. See also Qur'an 3:19; 9:33; and Islam's five pillars of faith: (1) Shahadah (testimony): "There is no god but Allah," (2) Salah (praying five times a day); (3) Sawm (fasting during Ramadan); (4) Zakah (purification of wealth or giving to the poor); and (5) Haj (pilgrimage to Mecca).

<sup>9</sup>Additional texts about the Trinity in the New Testament: Matt 3:16-17; John 3:34; 14:16-17; Acts 2:38-39; 5:29-32; 19:5-8; Rom 5:1-5; 8:9-11; 1 Cor 12:3-6; 2 Cor 13:14; Gal 4:6; Eph 1:13-14; 2:19-22; 3:1-7, 14-19; 4:4-6; 5:18-20; 1 Thess 1:2-5; 5:18-19; 2 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 1:3-14; Heb 2:3-4; 6:4-6; 9:14; 1 Pet 1:2; 4:14; 1 John 4:2; 4:13-14; 5:5-9; Jude 20-21; Rev 1:4-5; 5:6-7; 14:9-13; 22:16-18. See also texts on the divinity of Jesus, especially John 1:1-3; 8:58; 20:28. On the divinity of the Holy Spirit, see especially Acts 5:3-4, 9.

<sup>10</sup>The word "Trinity" never appears in the Bible, however the concept of the Trinity is present and is progressively revealed. From it one can learn the lesson of how important it is to gradually present this teaching to our friends so that they may also step by step become familiar with it and grow into a full understanding of God's truth.

<sup>11</sup>The term *elohim* is used 2,603 times in the Hebrew Bible according to Abraham Even-Shoshan (1993:69-74). Several names or titles are used in the Hebrew Scripture for God, like *Yahweh* (LORD), *El* (God), *Elohim*

(God), Elyon (Most High), El Elyon (God Most High), Adonay (Lord), Shadday (Almighty), El Shadday (God Almighty), etc.

Another title as a grammatical plural for the living God (besides Elohim) is Adonay (Lord). This term is used only for the true God and never designates pagan gods. He is the Lord of His household. See, for examples, Gen 18:30; Exod 34:23; Deut 10:17; Josh 3:11, 13; Pss 35:23; 45:11; 114:7; 135:5; Isa 6:1; Dan 1:2; Mal 1:6.

<sup>12</sup>For exceptions to this rule when the plural verb is used with Elohim, see Gen 20:13; 35:7; Ps 58:11. God is called "Creator" (singular) in Isa 40:28; but in Eccl 12:1 for the expression of "Creator," the plural form of bara' is used. God is designated as "Maker" in the plural form of 'asah in Job 35:10; Ps 149:2; Isa 54:5. Plural adjectives that describe God as holy are in Josh 24:19 and Prov 9:10; 30:3.

<sup>13</sup>For example, the first person singular for Allah is used in Qur'an 2:186; 20:14, 82; the first person plural is employed in Qur'an 15:9, 85; 41:39; and both singular and plural pronouns are together mentioned in Qur'an 54:9-16.

<sup>14</sup>Muslims differentiate between "we" as a plural of numbers and "we" as that of respect and honor (see Deedat).

<sup>15</sup>For the meaning of echad, I am indebted to Edgar 2004:69-84 and Pryor 2003:50-60.

<sup>16</sup>For a detailed description of the theological usage of these two names of God, see Cassuto 1983:15-41.

<sup>17</sup>How can we identify the Angel of the Lord as God? 1. He speaks in the first person singular with "I" formulas as if He Himself were God when bringing a message (Gen 16:10; 22:16-17; 31:13; Exod 3:6; Judg 6:14). 2. The biblical text uses in parallel terms the "angel of the Lord" and the "Lord" or "God," and thus identifies them as one Being (Gen 22:11, 15; 31:3, 11, 13; Exod 3:2, 4, 7; Judg 2:1-2; 6:11, 14, 22; 13:3, 13, 22; Zech 3:1-2). 3. He describes Himself as holy (Exod 3:2, 5). 4. He carries out God's judgment (2 Sam 24:16; 2 Kgs 19:35). 5. God's Name is in Him (Exod 23:20-23). 6. He takes on a human appearance as in cases of theophany, God's pre-incarnate appearances (Josh 5:13-15; Judg 13:6, 10, 21).

<sup>18</sup>The task of the Servant of the Lord (ebed Yahweh) in Isaiah is enormous and can be accomplished only by God. The Servant was appointed to be the Savior for the whole world! Isa 49:6 records what the Lord says about the mission of His Servant: "It is a too small [light] thing for you to be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved [remnant] of Israel. I will also give you for a light to the Gentiles [nations] to be [not only 'proclaim' or 'announce' but 'be!'] my salvation to the ends of the earth." Consider also His salvific atoning death for humanity according to Isaiah 53. No wonder that the early church recognized that this

role of the Suffering Servant was fulfilled in life and death of Jesus Christ (Acts 8:30, 35).

<sup>19</sup>Isa 63:8-10 asserts the personality of the Holy Spirit who is "grieved" by disobedience (see also Ps 106:33; compare Eph 4:30). This Hebrew verb is always used in conjunction with persons, never with power, influence, or inanimate things.

<sup>20</sup>M. J. Lagrange aptly states, "If he uses the plural, this supposes that there is in him a fullness of being so that he can deliberate with himself " (1896:387).

<sup>21</sup>The expression was used by Ellen G. White: "There are three living persons of the heavenly trio" (1946:615).

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